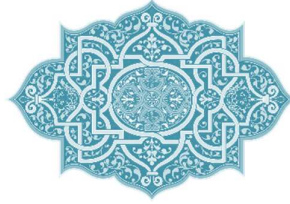


KEY POINTS – LESSON 5



Speaker: Ustadh Noman Ali Khan³

Notes by: Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf (also includes relevant details from other sources)

LIGHT UPON LIGHT

This lecture is based on the beautiful description of our spiritual heart that Allah swt provides in Surah Nur, verse 24. We have classified the discussion in various headings and sub-heading to facilitate easier navigation and review through the lecture contents.

Limited nature of human understanding:

The first point that we need to clarify is that our mind cannot grasp the complete understanding of God. If our intellect can completely grasp a thing, it means it is limited and it cannot be God. In fact, our intellect is so limited that it has failed to understand the human being too. Even those who have done PhDs on personality sciences and psychology do not have a definitive answer for what personality is. Things proven in one study are easily challenged in the studies that come shortly after them.

Let us consider an example of a wall. If we ask some blind men to go and check out about this wall, what would be their response? They would be able to touch the wall and tell us

³ Ustad Nouman Ali Khan is the founder and CEO of Bayyinah, as well as the lead instructor for a number of Bayyinah courses including the 'Fundamentals of Classical Arabic' and 'Divine Speech'. His first exposure to Arabic study was in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia where he completed his elementary education. He continued Arabic grammar study in Pakistan, where he received a scholarship for ranking among the top 10 scores in the national Arabic studies board examinations in 1993. But his serious training in Arabic began in the United States in 1999 under Dr. Abdus-Samie, founder and former principal of Quran College, Faisalabad, Pakistan who happened to be touring the US for intensive lectures in Tafsir and Arabic studies. Under Dr. Abdus-Samie, Nouman developed a keen methodical understanding of Arabic grammar and tafseer sciences. He further benefited from Dr. Abdus-Samie by internalizing his unique teaching methods and later translating his work into English for the benefit of his own students. Ustad Nouman served as professor of Arabic at Nassau Community College until '06 and has taught Modern Standard and Classical Arabic at various venues for many years with his students spread around the globe. His recent achievement is the Bayyinah dream programs around the globe which has resulted in preparation of many new teachers of Arabic language who are now benefitting their local communities in a much more effective way. In a short span of time, he has truly changed thousands of lives.

that it exists. But how exactly it is, they would not know. They would need to ask those who can see it. Even those who can see it with their eyes may not be able to see the finer details of it that are only visible with special instruments. And those finer particles in the wall contain even finer particles. Our abilities stop at a certain point.

Accordingly, we need to begin this discussion with a point in mind that our intellects are limited and we are just shown a glimpse of the reality of things in this passage. Many of the finer details of the points that we will discuss are beyond our limited vision and only Allah swt knows them in full. The closer to Allah swt we get, the more knowledge of these matters He would uncover for us.

Passage and translation (Surah Nur, Ayah 24):

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche, in which there is a lamp, the lamp is enclosed in crystal, the crystal is of a starlike brilliance, it is lit with the olive oil from a blessed olive tree which is neither eastern nor western, its very oil would almost be luminous though no fire touched it - as though all the means of increasing Light upon Light are provided - Allah guides to His Light whom He pleases. Allah cites such parables to make His message clear to the people; and Allah has knowledge of everything.

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ
فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ
الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ
الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ
يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ
لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ
يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ
نُّورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ
يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ
وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ
وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Types of light in this passage:

Allah swt talks here about two types of light (Noor ala noor)

- External Light
- Internal Light

External Light:

Allah swt is the light of heavens and the earth. Everything we see around is because of His light.



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اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

What happens if there is no light:

- We cannot see even if we have eyes
- We are not able to see the reality of things around us and can't appreciate their beauty

There is an interesting phenomenon about light and its sources. Our visibility in a room with a little bit of light is much less than our visibility in a room with a lot of light. So, as the light increases, our vision increases.

However, it only happens to a certain extent and then the limitation of our eyes come in our way. If a light, is too bright, we cannot look at that. We can feel that it exists, but we cannot look at that. That is why Allah swt has kept himself and his secrets hidden from our physical and spiritual eyes. As the capability of our eyes and vision enhances, Allah swt uncovers more and more details about His divine system.

This external light of Allah swt benefits everyone irrespective of if one is a believer or not.

Internal light:

The second type of light is internal. This is the light that we need to journey through this life that has been given to us. If this light is lit, we can see the reality of things. If it is not, we would take some things as what they are not.

First, let's understand the parable.

Let's visualize this for a minute. Allah swt is giving us a parable of a lamp which is inside a niche (a structure in the wall where lamps used to be placed).

مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ

Now, what is the purpose of a niche? If something is placed in a niche, it spreads the light to a much wider area because of the way it is made. If the lamp is placed in any other part of the house, it cannot give the same level of brightness as when it is placed in the niche.

Ubay bin Ka'b R.A. and Ibn Abbas R.A. explain that this is about the heart of the believer and how Allah swt has lit it. The light being talked about is the light of iman.

Allah swt then explains:

فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ



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In this [niche] is the lamp!

This is the light of guidance that Allah swt has sowed in the hearts of believers through iman. Now Allah swt explains some more finer details about this:

الْمَصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ

الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ

That lamp is in a glass.

What is the purpose of glass?

The purpose of glass is to protect the lamp from extinguishing and also to further illuminate its light. The glass in which this light is placed is the most refined of the glasses and has its own illumination too.

Heart of the believer:

It is the heart of the believer. Naturally, it is shining brightly as we are told that each child is born on the fitrah.

However, this glass can get dirty.

Allah swt tells us that our hearts get rusted and dirty because of what we do.

كَلَّا مَبْذُولٌ رَّانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

When it is dirty, it doesn't let enough light to pass through. We accordingly, end up in darkness. Even if the lamp is burning, we cannot see its light.

An example of that is the rusted hearts or the hearts of the ignorant or the hypocrites. They do not have access to the fuel that brightens the lamp and the glasses on their hearts have been darkened, so no light comes out. The covers of their hearts are also blackened so they cannot see its light.

When we are in darkness, we cannot understand the reality of things. We would not know what is beneficial and what is harmful. We might consider something good but in reality, it may be bad for us. And we may consider something bad which in reality may be good for us!

How to clean the glass around the lamp:

We need to make an effort to clean it from the rubbish.

- Sometimes, you need to wash this glass with the water of your tears.



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- Sometimes, when something hits these deposits in a certain way, these deposits of dirt crack apart and the pure heart comes out. This hit can come in the form of inspiring words, the influence of those who are nearer to Allah swt, certain events in life or other things that happen to us by the will of Allah swt.

We also need to understand that in order to keep this glass clean, we will need to do two things:

- Stop the sources of dust, dirt, and contamination that make the lamp dirty. Stop sinning!
- Keep cleaning the lamp regularly. Sit in the company of scholars, be with the righteous, make efforts to soften your hearts.

Fuel for the lamp:

Allah swt explains:

يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ

i.e. the lamp is lit with a blessed [Mubarak] olive tree.

Meaning of Mubarak:

Mubarak here means that it contains numerous benefits. Benefits of olive are many.

Just like Zaitoon which gives the brightest of light and has many benefits, the light of wahi – the divine guidance – also benefits us from a number of spheres and becomes a light for us in this world as well as the hereafter.

This tree is neither eastern nor western.

لَا شَرْقِيَّةٌ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٌ

It is the tree that gets illuminated by the sun when it is rising and also when it is setting down. So, it has been given the best of nourishment so that its users benefit from it the most. Similarly, this tree is not within any other bunch of trees but at its own. So it is well nourished by the minerals from the soil too. Accordingly, it is the best of the oils that can be used to lit the lamps.

The Quran is also not for either east or west – it is for everybody for the all the times. It is for the whole humanity.

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The purity of this oil is such that is ready to catch fire even when the fire has not yet touched it. When the belief is strong in our heart, it is ready to get lit with the light of the Quran by merely going near it.

يَكَادُ رَيْثُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ

The oil whereof almost gives light though fire touch it not

i.e. the oil is so ready to catch fire that even when the fire is brought near it, it catches fire and starts spreading brightness.

نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ

This is the concept of light. The two lights have combined.

يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ

This guidance does not come to everyone. It only comes to those who Allah wishes.

Accordingly, the prophet PBUH used to make a lot of prayers for his heart to be firm on the guidance.

Allah swt has given us this example to make things simple for us, as he mentions

وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ

The real and full knowledge of things rests with him.

وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

What do we learn from this:

1. Be cautious about hearts

Success in the hereafter depends on the condition of heart we will take with us. The Day on which neither wealth will be of any use, nor children; Only those who come before Allah with a pure heart will be saved.

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ

إِلَّا مَنِ اتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

(Quran 26:88-89)

2. If the heart is good, everything is good:



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I heard Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as having said this (and Nu'man) pointed towards his ears with his fingers): What is lawful is evident and what is unlawful is evident, and in between them are the things doubtful which many people do not know. So he who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and honor blameless, and he who indulges in doubtful things indulges in fact in unlawful things, just as a shepherd who pastures his animals round a preserve will soon pasture them in it. Beware, every king has a preserve, and the things God has declared unlawful are His preserves. Beware, in the body there is a piece of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound and if it is corrupt the whole body is corrupt, and hearken it is the heart.

3. To remove the rust:

The Prophet of Allah said: Just like how the iron gets rusted with water, human hearts also get rusted. Companions asked about how to get rid of this rust. The prophet said: remembering death often, and doing the tilawah of the Quran (i.e. reading it with an intention to seek guidance and follow)

CONTEMPLATION TASK FOR LESSON 5:

Your contemplation task for the day is to think about how we can fuel the lamp within our body, how to keep it well it, how to feed it with the pure oil that it deserves. How to clean the zujaja or glass around it so that its light illuminates our life.

Note:

In order to acquire a better understanding of this topic, refer to the following course:

1. Noor Ala Noor (light upon light) lecture by Ustadh Noman Ali Khan (included in this course)
2. Explanation of this passage by Dr. Israr Ahmed (included in the Muntakhab Nisab series which is available in English as well as Urdu)

Tafseer Maarif ul Quran by Mufti Muhammad Shafi